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# Travel Award Reports



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# 'The Impact of Culture and Geography in Indonesia'

by Andrew Halton

**Location:** Indonesia

**Award:** B H Farmer Fund

**Dates:** 15 August – 14 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I visited a number of Indonesian islands with the aim of discovering the cultural and physical diversity of this vast island archipelago. In particular through travel I aimed to soak up the cultural diversity that such a wide ranging country would offer and see the various impacts such diversity has on the country. I wanted to see whether identities of Indonesians clashed with each other, and hopefully penetrate the surface of Indonesia and see what lay underneath. I also aimed to look at how foreign cultures, particularly western ones imported by tourism, interacted with those already present in Indonesia.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I enjoyed the opportunity to visit such a varied country. I saw vast the temple complexes of Prambanan and Borobodur and climbed for picture postcard views of Mt. Bromo, an active volcano in Java. I got to experience Indonesian Independence day and the end of Ramadan. I visited the white sand beaches of the Gili Islands and the coral reefs of Nusa Lembongan. But most enjoyable was seeing and interacting with the people that live in these beautiful places, witnessing how they differed and yet how they were similar. Thus the most enjoyable thing about

Indonesia was a chance to experience its rich and varied culture and see how such cultures interact on a national scale.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

Occasionally, as a country with a developed tourist infrastructure, it was difficult to get beyond the tourist sites and see the real country. In some places this wasn't necessarily a problem, for in Bali tourism is such a huge part of the island's culture and economy that it was the most significant aspect to experience. To overcome these issues we aimed wherever possible to use public transport and sometimes go to places such as Mataram (Lombok) or Denpasar (Bali) which lack the tourist pulls of other places but possess another vantage point of life on the islands.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

Throughout my first year in the trip much emphasis was placed on ideas of identity and cultural contexts, especially with reference to the modern nation-state and contemporary processes of globalisation. Such concepts were very much apparent in Indonesia where ideas of national identity are superimposed on other regional and local identities, based around heritages, ethnicity and religion. My trip gave me the opportunity to witness such interactions being played out in reality. Not only did it shed light on these concepts but also provided me with the drive and desire to explore them in more detail. Furthermore it provided inspiration and ideas for my dissertation next summer. My trip represents my first genuine experience of independent travel and thus will act as a springboard for planning further travel and exploration.

# 'Hiking the Fagaras-Ridge in Transylvania'

by Paloma Navarro Negredo

**Location:** Romania

**Award:** C W Brasher Fund

**Dates:** 2 – 13 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

The project firstly involved a road trip from Bonn (Germany) to the small mountain village of Turnu Rosu located in the western end of the Fagaras ridge in Romania. Once there we started a seven-day hike which took us to the eastern end of the ridge. Each day we walked an average of 15 km which usually took us 12 hours. During our hike we climbed the highest peaks of the ridge and we managed to reach the highest point in Romania, the summit of the Moldoveanu Peak (2544 m). We slept in cabanas (mountain huts) for three nights where we met other hikers and engaged with the cabaniers who told us interesting stories about Romania and the Fagaras. For the other three nights we camped in places surrounded by the most beautiful scenery. Once the hike was finished we returned to the starting point (thanks to a Chilean hiker who offered us a lift), retrieved our car and took a different route to return to Germany.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I really enjoyed organising a hiking trip on my own: planning the road trip, buying food in advance, deciding how much to walk each day, where to sleep, what to eat; spending an entire week in the mountains, without all



those every-day facilities which tend to govern our lives these days, and enjoying the beauty and simplicity of nature and becoming part of it.

The road trip was also a very valuable experience. Even though before starting the trip I was not happy at all



with driving 3500km when we could just take a plane, I really enjoyed driving to Romania. It gave me the opportunity to see the country in much more depth and to visualise the changes whilst moving from Germany into Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania.

**What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?**

Even though we chose to go to the Fagaras in September since it promises to be the time with the best weather, the weather was not what we were expecting. From days in which it rained from 7am until 6pm when we finally got to the cabana, to days in which we were thankful of our 15kg backpacks because the wind was so strong it felt like it could blow you away and finally days in which a dense fog covered it all and did not allow us to see more than 2 meters ahead of us.

The first day we were also surprised by a pack of sheepdogs who followed us furiously barking at us. Threatening with a stone and the call from the shepherd was enough in the end to make them return to their flock but they certainly gave us an unpleasant start of our hike.

**How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?**

Every time I made a hiking trip before there was always someone else in charge and therefore I did not have any direct responsibility if things did not go as planned. This time though I, together with my partner, were the people in charge and thus the people to blame if things went wrong. Feeling the responsibility on my shoulders when taking decisions and keeping calm when facing difficult situations has helped me to grow as a person and to cope with stress much better. This will certainly help me with my studies, especially during exam term.

~

I would just like to thank the College for giving me this opportunity. It was a challenging and rewarding experience which I would have not been able to do without the College's help.

# 'Hiking along the Fagaras-Ridge in Transylvania'

by Felix Schaaf

**Location:** Romania

**Award:** C W Brasher Fund

**Dates:** 2 – 13 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

As with any hiking trip, the main activity is, well, hiking for most of the day. However, each day also included smaller yet crucial tasks: setting up the tent, cooking food in the wild, or making small repairs on the equipment.



What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

First and foremost, I enjoyed being cut off from civilisation for an entire week: no mobile phone, no internet, and no television. At times we had not encountered a single human being for two days in a row. This week made me realise to what extent we actually have succumbed to the notion of constant availability which is so potently symbolised in the form of Blackberry smart phones. Although it was a rather unnerving experience for the first couple of days in the mountains, I now really appreciate the importance and immense merits of being able to 'switch-off'.

Also, as cliché as it sounds, one learns to appreciate the simple things. A cereal bar or several dried fruits suddenly turn into nectar and ambrosia after a couple of hours of a challenging hike.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

Although we were hiking between ten and twelve hours every day, the physical aspect of the trip, surprisingly, was less challenging than I thought. However, I completely underestimated the patience and resilience a long-distance hike requires, especially when the weather conditions are rather poor. For example: during our last day we were walking in constant fog, rain, and strong winds for ten hours straight. I cannot describe how frustrating of an experience it is. Furthermore, it becomes extremely difficult to contain one's frustration and bad mood as one naturally tends to let off some steam in such situations, usually to the detriment of the general mood in the team.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

Although not of an academic nature, I feel the project

has assisted both my personal development and studies. In the first case, I have improved in areas such as working in a small team under extreme conditions and re-orientating myself in terms of what is truly necessary and what is merely ornamental to my lifestyle. Equally, however, the project had beneficial aspects on my studying skills, i.e., when it comes to the ability to just 'push on' no matter

the conditions or circumstances. More strangely, I also think my exposure to 'nature', and the sentiments evoked by it, put me in the right mindset to continue working on my dissertation on the German Romantics and to perhaps better appreciate their thoughts and feelings on the subject matter.



# 'Geological Mapping Project in Chile and South American Travels'

by Robert Green

**Location:** Vallenar, Chile

**Award:** Cooper Fund

**Dates:** 9 July – 2 October 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

As required by the Part II Geological sciences trip, over the long vacation we undertook a geological mapping project in the La Tortora valley, near Vallenar in Chile. The success of this, the fieldwork portion of the project, was more than we could have hoped for. We were not only able to collect data in what can only be described as a jewel of a geological area, but the connections that we made with university staff at the University of Chile in Santiago as well as within the local community land-owners will hopefully allow future groups to undertake similar ventures.

We then continued our travels north through South America, eventually flying back from Lima, Peru. Along the way we experienced many different cultures and undertook a great many activities; from climbing 18,000ft+ peaks and cycling the worlds most dangerous road to visiting the gold mines of Bolivia.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I really enjoyed the physical aspect that came with our

academic work. I loved being out in the desolate mountain deserts every day with only condors and vicucas to hear our voices and footsteps. We climbed 4,500ft most days to where we mapped and being an active person I far preferred this to sitting at a desk through the summer.

We were also staying in a very remote village for our project and I enjoyed meeting the locals there and attempting to converse with our relatively limited Spanish. Everyone was very friendly and we joined in with the festivities during the annual village fiesta in which the place came alive.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The language barrier was one of the most frustrating things for me during our travels. In Chile I struggled immensely to understand even our hosts, as Chile has such a strong accent unlike Spain. However as the summer went on I definitely improved and when we were in Bolivia I was far more comfortable carrying out the tasks I needed to do. This was mainly to do with the Bolivians' beautifully slow and clear Spanish, but I felt I was beginning to pick more and more up.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

This trip was a truly fantastic way to complete our fieldwork for our part II mapping project. Having got to grips with the unfamiliar geology the exposure offered us the opportunity to map and take data on a number of geological structures that are rarely if ever exposed in the greenery of Britain.

The project was also very personally challenging as we had to complete such a long time in the field. I feel as if I have come away from the project with the new skill of being able to maintain my own enthusiasm in something for

such a long period of time.

I am now taking a Spanish course at the Cambridge University Language Centre because I found the language so interesting and want to get better, and I wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't for this trip.

I have also found a new love of climbing really big mountains. I have always been a hiker and skipped up everything Britain has to offer in terms of mountains, but I am now keen to go further afield and scale some bigger challenges.

## 'Morocco'

by Ben Alden-Falconer

**Location:** Morocco

**Award:** Glyn and Ruth Daniel Fund

**Dates:** 24 August – 8 September 2010



I first went to Morocco in 2004 and loved it. Just a short ferry ride from the south of Spain, but a stark contrast to the coast opposite it. You are immediately hit with the reality of a place where life is lived slightly more on the edge - be that the strong smells, thousands beggars, constant hassling, bartering, wild traffic, buckets of water being tipped from blocks of flats, or wild cats and dogs roaming the streets. This trip as a young teenager made a big impression on me, it opened my eyes to travelling - inspiring me to have a gap year, but also made me curious about the long historic interactions between the East and West that are so apparent there. Ever since then I have



been determined to return and explore the country to a greater extent than that short first crossing could possibly have allowed. After spending a good chunk of this year studying the modern rise of Islamism it seemed like an appropriate time to return to this fast-modernising Islamic kingdom.

The Morocco that awaited me was a far more opulent and touristy one (at least in the big cities), but one that had managed to retain its original charm. My trip was also far more extensive. An adventure that saw me cover a remarkable range of scenery.

From wiggling along the small mountain roads of the high Altas with sheer drops on one side and a driver who was on Ramadan - so hadn't eaten or drunk all day - to the Sahara Desert, where after camel trekking through the dark we arrived at our camp, lit only by candlelight and climbed the massive dune next to us to get a better view of night sky. Every step we took the sand slid back down so by the time we reached the third tier of this dune we were out of breath and panting.

As well as going along the Atlantic coast with fortified ex-European outposts, and windy beaches filled with kite-surfing enthusiasts. While also exploring the famous urban sceneries and throwing myself into haggling in Fez, Meknes, Marrakesh, as well as the more serene, now ruined, Roman city of Volubilis.

The interactions between the East and West that so fascinated me as a young teen are still apparent everywhere in Morocco, even if that is whether one town speaks Spanish or French as their second language. What struck me this visit was not simply how long an interaction it has been - the Roman ruins at Volubilis really brought this home - but how recent the rise of the West was. In Fez mosques five

hundred years old were termed 'new', and the city was a hub of international trade and creativity well before that. The power and influence of the West, in comparison, is remarkably recent. Judging by the aspiration levels of

ordinary people for their children and the co-operation I witnessed during Ramadan, it is not a country that intends to stay behind for very long.



# 'Travel Morocco'

by Aurora Horwood

**Location:** Morocco

**Award:** Glyn and Ruth Daniel Fund

**Dates:** 24 August – 6 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

Much of the trip composed of exploring the sites of Morocco, exploring the ancient medinas and architecture of the imperial cities. Through this I was able to experience Morocco's rich culture, and interacting with local people only enhanced this. Visiting archaeological sites such as Volubilis, the Kasbahs of Ait Benhaddou and traversing the dunes of the Sahara desert were other activities that were undertaken on the trip.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

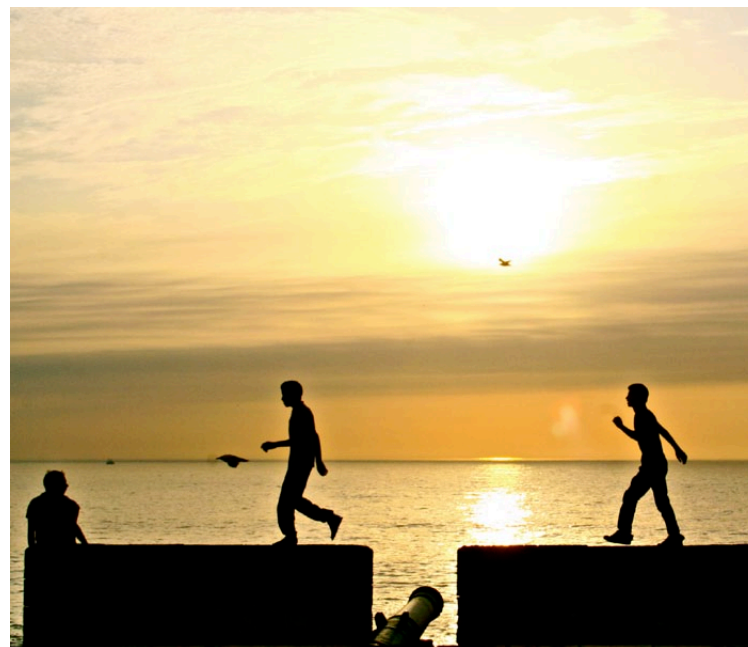
I particularly enjoyed making the most of the photographic opportunities of such a picturesque country and relished documenting my travel with my camera. Furthermore, being able to see so many amazing sights, visiting beautiful places and so forth were extremely enjoyable.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

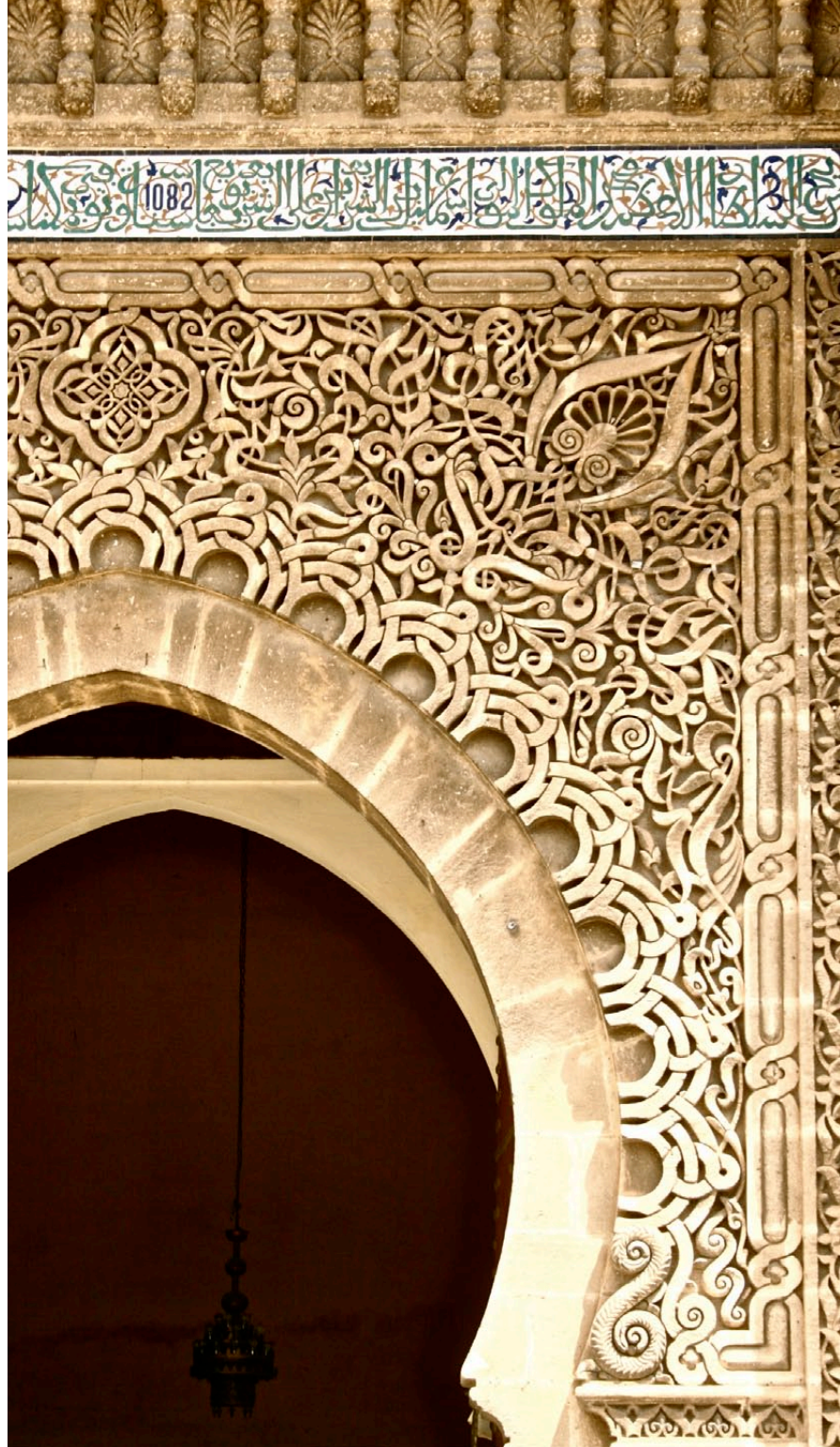
When visiting Morocco it was Ramadan and so during the day this at times proved a problem as regards the purchase of food, furthermore not speaking fluent French meant that communication with Moroccans was at time not as easy as it might have been.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

This project assisted me in my studies by allowing me to experience at first hand the impact of imperialism and colonialism on a country, and to see how that has mingled with the parochial culture of the country. All of this was in conjunction with one of my history papers and was very interesting. Along with this, travelling aided my personal development by exposing me to a wholly different culture which at times proved intense, however I feel this trip has made me feel more comfortable with travelling and more independent. Thus in future I feel that travelling will prove less daunting, and this trip has also helped me further appreciate different cultures other than my own native one.







# 'Egypt 2010'

by Sameena Hussain

Location: Egypt

Award: Glyn and Ruth Daniel Fund

Dates: August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

- Visiting historical and national sites of interest,
- Visiting religious places,
- Learning Arabic

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

- Meeting new people,
- Different cultures.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

- Language barrier,
- Cultural misunderstandings,
- Heat!

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

- Willing to use initiative more,
- Ability to deal with different types of people,
- Confidence in the face of a challenging situation.

# 'An academic and personal discovery of India and its environment'

by Leo Isaac-Dognin

Location: India

Award: Hanley Fund

Dates: July – August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

From the 9<sup>th</sup> of July to 15<sup>th</sup> of August, I participated in a course organised by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) at its headquarters in New Delhi, India. The group of participants was of twenty-six, with a mix of over ten nationalities (Western students and Indian/Nepali students on scholarships from CSE). The course addressed the challenges facing India's development, focusing on the environmental aspect which indirectly pointed out the country's economic, social, political, and institutional problems.

During four weeks, most of my time was spent in class where a wide range of prominent speakers (members of the government, lawyers, governmental economists, company executives, editors in chief, as well as analysts and engineers of CSE) talked to us about an equally wide range of issues. They were each specialists in their topic and held contrasting opinions. Each talk was followed by an hour of discussion where, among other things, each of us could explain how the issue would have been addressed in our respective countries. These talks were supplemented by field trips within Delhi, as well as by a week-long trip to the Himalayas north of Delhi, where we were able to

observe the environmental phenomena, social injustices, as well as solutions that were reviewed in 'class'. This trip also showed us the diversity of the Indian administration, culture and environment, further explaining the challenges facing development. On top of individual case studies, we were given the group task to create a magazine from writing to publishing, based on what we had learned and observed during our five weeks in India.

**What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?**

The most enjoyable features of the course were that on top of applying what I had learned in my first year of studies, I was able to understand Indian development from the inside. Being taught in an Indian context gave us access to information, opinions, and solutions (especially when they related to traditional Indian practices) rarely mentioned in the literature. The course covered each issue from an Indian perspective which was then contrasted with the view of the group's respective countries of origin. Long-term interaction with locals to such an extent, with the presence of Indian and Nepali students of mixed social background and the fact they also helped us communicate with people in the street of even lower social status, is normally very difficult. Similarly, our trip to the Himalayas, bringing us to isolated places even unknown to most Indians was also an unforgettable privilege.

**What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?**

The most challenging features were to work in Indian conditions and to cope with the insecure means of travel in the Himalayas; but both were part of the experience! The latter is quite straightforward: the roads in the Himalayas were insecure even relative to India (the width of a car with a 700m cliff on one side, landslides...) and this was only accentuated by the quality of the vehicles used and the speed at which drivers pushed them. Indian working

conditions, on the other hand, did not firstly appear as challenging. However, by the time we had to write a magazine, we realised the task was twice as hard than it would have been in Europe: while the heat made it difficult to focus, especially for long periods; power-cuts, the scarcity of materials from computers to books, the unending traffic as well as the different concept of 'time' and deadlines between Indians and Westerners made it very difficult to stick to a strict schedule and to meet our own deadlines.

**How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?**

This course could not have been closer linked to my course, and as said above, this was probably the biggest bonus on top of the cultural discovery. The course applied numerous concepts learned in first year of Land Economy, both from law and from economics, and addressed in-depth planning issues. Thus, it was both a crystallisation of what I had learned and a first step into what I am studying this year. However, it never repeated exactly what I knew since it always addressed the concepts from an Indian point of view and using examples from India. Beyond this link to my subject, the course also had much more technical aspects and offered several engineering skills (i.e. creating efficient water management or purification structures) that I would never have learned otherwise, but that are a great asset for future 'on the field' careers. Additionally, as I plan to work in developing countries and harsh environments, this was an important experience to get me used to working in a very different environment, in the context of different culture and mindset.





# 'Calcium Signalling'

by Heather Jayne Parker

**Location:** Department of Pharmacology, University of Cambridge

**Award:** Hanley Fund

**Dates:** 28 June – 20 August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

During the 2010 Long Vacation I undertook a placement in Professor Colin Taylor's laboratory, under the supervision of Dr. Steve Tovey. This laboratory is part of the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Cambridge, and studies the various roles of calcium as a signalling molecule within the cell. I carried out five core experiments over an 8-week duration, which were designed both to aid the work of the lab, and to provide me with valuable lab experience.

The first experiment studied the effects of cyclopiazonic acid (CPA) on calcium oscillations in HEK cells in response to sub-maximal doses of carbachol. Carbachol is a drug that binds and activates the acetylcholine receptor, causing production of IP<sub>3</sub> and calcium release from the E.R via IP<sub>3</sub> receptors. CPA reversibly inhibits Ca<sup>2+</sup> uptake into the E.R. It was found that pre-incubation of HEK cells with CPA decreased the frequency of calcium oscillations in response to sub-maximal doses of carbachol.

The second experiment investigated the effect of parathyroid hormone (PTH) on carbachol-induced calcium oscillations. Whilst PTH alone causes no rise in intracellular calcium concentration, it potentiated the rise in calcium seen in response to carbachol. It was found that PTH also increased the frequency of carbachol-induced calcium

oscillations. Ca<sup>2+</sup>-free medium was then used to further investigate this potentiation. It was found that when a second challenge with carbachol was unable to illicit a calcium response, the same dose of carbachol given alongside PTH was able to produce a calcium response in most cells.

The third set of experiments compared the carbachol-induced oscillations in calcium-containing medium and strontium-containing medium. It was proposed that, whilst the frequency and amplitude of calcium oscillations can be modulated by drugs such as CPA or by increasing carbachol concentration, the frequency and amplitude of strontium oscillations could not be modulated. It was found that this was not the case. Whilst pre-incubation with CPA had little effect on the frequency, increasing the carbachol dose markedly increased the frequency of strontium oscillations.

The fourth set of experiments compared the frequency of carbachol-induced calcium oscillations in control cells and in cells which had been transfected with an AC6-mCherry construct. It was found that transfection decreased both the response to carbachol and the frequency of carbachol-induced oscillations.

The final set of experiments established dose-response curves for both Carbachol and PTH (parathyroid hormone, which potentiates the response to carbachol in a mechanism that is thought to involve AC6 and cAMP). The DR curves were established for control cells, and for populations of cells transfected with each of three different AC6 constructs.

The placement allowed me to use a single cell imaging microscope, TIRF microscope and flexstation machine to study cells that I had cultured, loaded and transfected. The techniques learned will be valuable for the final year of my degree and beyond.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Although three-hour lab meetings might sound slightly painful, these were one of the aspects of working in a lab that I enjoyed most. The weekly meetings alternated between a journal session and lab reports. It was exhilarating to find myself sitting in a room full of extensive knowledge and a variety of talents that come together to form one cohesive unit. The 15 members of the lab contributed different viewpoints and ideas, which were listened to and valued whether they came from the lab head or even from myself.

I had initially thought that academics might lead a rather solitary working life, with each person working on their project alone. I was pleased to find that this was not the case. Though each lab member has their own particular project, the range of skills they have means that colleagues constantly help one another with their load. This might be as simple as donating a flask of cells after an unfortunate infection or something more involved such as teaching someone how to use the TIRF microscope and how to interpret their results. There was a great deal more teamwork and comradeship than I had expected, and this was definitely an aspect of the lab that I enjoyed.

Finally, I took great pleasure in learning the great variety of experimental techniques involved in my project. I improved existing skills such as simple pipetting and aseptic technique, and picked up new skills such as cell culturing and learning how to use the TIRF microscope.

**What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging and how has it assisted your studies and personal development?**

There were two main challenges that I was confronted with during this project. Firstly, the physical technique involved in the transfer of medium on the fluorescence microscope was difficult and took several days to master. This could be frustrating, as some of my experiments involved recording fluorescence for over an hour. If I accidentally

moved the microscope slide an infinitesimal amount whilst changing medium, that hour could have been completely wasted. Thankfully I overcame this problem, and the initial challenge only made the success more rewarding.

The second challenge was due to the nature of the project, since it involved live cells. I soon learnt that living cells behave differently from day to day, despite best efforts to keep variables the same. This sometimes presented problems as a drug concentration that had been optimal one day might produce no response in the cells, or too high a response, the next day. I now understand why it can take months to optimise cell buffers and drug concentrations. This would not discourage me from working with living cells again, but rather made me aware of one of the interesting idiosyncrasies of doing so.

This project has assisted me in three main ways. Firstly, I have picked up many experimental techniques that will be useful for both my final year research project and beyond. Secondly, I now have a much more realistic idea of what working in a laboratory involves; what the common problems are and how they are resolved. This has definitely aided me in my decision to continue studying after my undergraduate degree. Finally, I feel my confidence has grown, both in the laboratory setting itself, and also in meeting new people and working as part of a very successful team.

~

I would like to thank Professor Colin Taylor and Dr Steve Tovey for all their hard work and for allowing me to carry out a summer research project with them. My thanks also go to the other members of the lab who were accommodating, helpful and welcoming. I would also like to thank St John's College and the H R Durham Fund for providing me with grants to undertake this research project. Without them this experience might not have been possible, and I feel it has been a truly invaluable one.

# 'Investigating the role of HMGB1 in brain death associated inflammation'

by Daniel Knights

**Location:** Newcastle University

**Award:** Hanley Fund

**Dates:** 5 July – 16 August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I joined the Lung Immunobiology Group in the Institute of Cellular Medicine in Newcastle University, and was given my own project to work on. I became proficient in many different research skills, ranging from paper reading and results analysis to laboratory techniques such as ELISA, tissue culture and Western Blotting. By the end of my project, I was able to work fully independently and make critical decisions about the direction of my work myself. I was able to make a positive contribution to the work of the lab and there is every indication that my work may form part of a publication at some point in the future.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I particularly enjoyed discovering a new university and working environment, having the experience of largely working with postgraduates, just as I may do later in my career if I choose to pursue research further. It was also very satisfying to work through the challenges and failures of the project, working out what was going wrong and correcting it to achieve the results I eventually collected.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The time consuming and precise nature of lab research was a challenge, especially as much of it is relatively unstimulating academically! It was sometimes a challenge to keep focussed and to maintain direction when my tests didn't seem to be working!

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

I have gained a unique insight into the world of medical research, and am now in a position to make well informed decisions about how to include basic scientific research into my career as a doctor.



# 'Freetown, Sierra Leone'

by Daniel Paine

**Location:** Freetown, Sierra Leone

**Award:** Hanley Fund

**Dates:** 4 – 26 August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I helped run two Vacation Bible Schools in Freetown with a friend (aged 24) from my church. The first was held

in 'Guard Street' - one of the poorest, Muslim areas of the capital, right beside the sea; the second in Lumley, a more wealthy part of town. The children attending both were mostly between the ages of 5 and 13. The highest attendance at Guard Street was 130 children; at Lumley it was about 80. The VBSs lasted four and three mornings respectively.

Helping with the Bible Schools involved telling the Bible story for each day, teaching songs with actions, preparing and organising an Arts and Crafts activity each day – and generally attempting to keep the children organised and occupied! There were several Sierra Leoneans helping us run the days, especially by translating for us

sometimes. The children could all understand English, but to varying degrees, and all understand and communicate in Krio better. Lunch was cooked for everyone each day – cassava and gravy, potato leaf with rice, cassava leaf with rice, fried rice etc. Each day started at roughly 9am and finished after lunch.

Besides these Vacation Bible Schools, we went 'up country' for a few days, travelling West to Bo and Segbwema. Journeying in the open back of a jeep afforded us great views of the country. In Segbwema I was able to visit a Hospital where my Great Aunt and Uncle were based with the Methodist Missionary Society during the 1960s. I met one blind man who remembered my Great Uncle and had a few stories to tell about him. I also



visited several small farms with a half-English, half-Sierra Leonean man named Chris, who has studied agriculture. There was little evidence of mechanisation on the farms, and the livestock I saw was poorly bred. On the other hand, it was encouraging to be shown 'New Rice for Africa' (or 'Nerica') being grown in a research plot – this is a high yielding, resilient crop that has been developed by crossing African and Asian rice species.

Other activities included running along Lumley beach, playing football with the locals, visiting a spectacular Beach called No. 2 River, leading some Bible studies with young adults, and going to two Birthday Parties. My friend and I each gave a Bible talk for a group of former prostitutes (whom the missionary couple we were staying with are helping to find jobs – including baking and marketing cakes – through the help of a Christian local named Sahr). I also attended an 'all night' church service at a 'Prosperity Church' (which was uncomfortably charismatic and had dubious teaching), shopped in the markets and helped our hosts with some IT issues! The local food was largely very good and constituted most of what we ate during our stay. I learned from our hosts' cook how to cook a couple of African dishes.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Working with the children was really enjoyable – as well as being quite overwhelming at

times. The Guard Street kids are extremely tough as a result of living in very poor circumstances, but this made our input feel all the more worthwhile. Preparing all the arts and crafts, song sheets, drawings/illustrations etc. was also good fun. And getting to know the other Sierra Leonean helpers was great. The children from the better off area of Freetown were better disciplined and quieter, so we could run slightly more advanced activities with them.

Another extremely fulfilling aspect of the time was living with the missionary couple (now in their late 50s/60s and English and Canadian in origin). Having spent 11 years in the country, they were able to tell us many stories about their experiences in Sierra Leone (including ones relating



to the civil war) and other countries (mainly Indonesia). They gave me many insights into Sierra Leone's culture and history. They have built their lives on serving God in the country, working for a charity called UFM Worldwide.

### What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

A challenging aspect of being in Sierra Leone was trying to fathom how the country could raise itself out of its relative poverty. Infrastructure is so obviously lacking all over the country – the bumpiness of the roads and the state of vehicles being cases in point. Life expectancy is around 47 years. The gap between Sierra Leone and developed nations felt very large indeed.

Another challenging aspect was trying to appreciate what these people went through in the civil war (1991-2001). We heard one woman's graphic account of the day almost all her family were killed in a grenade blast at their home; she herself lost her legs. Seeing her face and hearing her voice as she recounted this painful story (in excellent English) made the reality of the atrocities that occurred hit home. Amputees were frequently to be seen, sometimes hard to distinguish from those crippled by Polio.

It would be hard not to be challenged about how privileged a life I enjoy in the UK. I saw how sums of money I would normally treat lightly can make such important contribu-

tions to people's lives there – especially in relation to education. The large numbers of street vendors and beggars – seemingly with so few customers, so many competitors and so few alternative means of employment – were a daily reminder of what the reality of life is for so many people there.

Finally, what I heard about – and experienced of – the numerous Prosperity Churches was challenging, since these make their leaders very wealthy by promising their congregations that God will bless them abundantly if they make generous offerings. It is especially wrong when so many are living in such obvious poverty.



## How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

By visiting Sierra Leone I experienced and saw some of the circumstances and scenarios I learnt about while studying the International Development Paper in the Land Economy Tripos. Sierra Leone is the 3rd poorest country in the world (using the UN HDI measure of poverty). My academic study of the causes of and remedies for poverty became very relevant, but also felt slightly inadequate to explain/solve the situation.

As for personal development, the children's work forced me to increase in confidence in leading from the front, organising events and making decisions. I learned more about communicating across cultures and being sensitive to people's tough – sometimes horrific – backgrounds.

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I am extremely grateful for the funding that gave me this opportunity. Having lived in Sierra Leone I cannot look at Western standards of living in the same light, and I am in no doubt about how great are the needs of the country or how valuable is the work that my hosts there are doing.



# 'Where East Meets West: Examining the Integration and Juxtaposition of Traditional Japanese and Western Cultural Ideals in Tokyo'

by Julia F Li

**Location:** Tokyo, Japan

**Award:** Frank Hollick Fund

**Dates:** 4 – 8 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

Our project involved an exploration of the mega-city known as Tokyo and its symbolism in globalisation. Tokyo is one of the most populous metropolitan areas in the world and is a financial command centre. It truly represents a physical space in which East meets in West – noticed everywhere in advertisements of products endorsed by Western movie stars (E.g. Tommy Lee Jones was everywhere). In addition, it is also a resilient city that has survived wars, earthquakes, attacks and upheavals. Tokyo's traditional shrines and parks in the epicentre of this sprawling and breathing giant are places of tranquil peace and reflection.

Priyanka Narayan and I explored eight of the twenty-three 'special wards' of Tokyo. The tourist-laden streets of Harajuku juxtaposed on a perpendicular angle to the magnificent Meiju Shrine (built in memory of Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken). We crossed the road from the meditative gardens of the Emperor's Imperial East Gardens into the concrete jungles of banks and company headquar-

ters in central Tokyo. (You cannot even find shops and doors on the streets of the concrete jungle as all the buildings were connected by an underground maze of passages and shopping malls). And at night, we contrasted the heat of the day in popular Ginza with the cool air-conditioning breeze in the karaoke lounges popping up on every street corner (as frequently as coffee shops) in Shibuya and Ikebukuro.

Tokyo's neighbouring wards represent the contrasts of culture and values depicted in fashion, architecture and food. The goal of the trip was to be open-minded in exploration and embrace a new culture through a Western perspective of Eastern everyday life. Mission accomplished.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Whilst in Tokyo learning about East meets West culture, we also discovered by Tokyo is nicknamed by many guidebooks as food-lover's paradise. There were endless small eateries (izakayas) and food stands at every subway entrance. We sampled our way through at least 10 different flavours of mochi balls (glutinous rice ball desserts) that lined the entrances of each shopping plaza and cooled down with tofu flavoured ice-cream at the exit of Meiju Temple.

Second, the friendly and helpful locals were greatly appreciated. The courteous nature of the Japanese people allowed for an easy embrace of their culture and customs. And whereas in Cambridge, we would think it may be strange to go karaoking for 30 minutes each day, the locals took it in stride as a post-work relaxation technique before embarking a long-train ride home into the suburbs. Every time we were lost, helpful locals took our maps and directed us through sign language as we spoke no Japanese. Directions were always dispensed with a smile and a bow.

Finally, I personally enjoyed the project working

together with a fellow Johnian in a team. As graduate students, PhD work often is very concentrated in silos and leaves few avenues for real creativity and out-of-the box thinking. Exploring Tokyo with another St John's member allowed me to share thoughts and explore my arts and adventure side more so than in the Engineering Department in Cambridge.

### What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

I found two points of the travel project challenging: language and weather. The language barrier of not being able to read, write or speak Japanese was understandable and I was well prepared with always carrying a map in dual English/Japanese and a guidebook. However, not being able to communicate with the locals in their own language proved to be a social barrier in discovering what Tokyo youth thought about their own city's recent development in the past half-century. The information I was able to gather was from tourist signposts and descriptions only in museums, attraction descriptions and guidebooks. Luckily, I had two friends currently studying abroad at Universities in Tokyo and was fortunate enough to get a glimpse of everyday University-life through their eyes and some enlightenment about the details of everyday living from a non-tourist perspective.

The second (unexpected) challenge for me was the weather. The weather was approximately 35-degrees Celsius combined with high humidity. For someone who is allergic to chemicals in air-conditioners, the combination of strong air-conditioning mixed with the humid natural weather caused slight headaches. However, my 100-Yen shop purchase (equivalent of Pound-stretcher shops here) of a large Japanese paper fan on the second day saved my trip and greatly enhanced my enjoyment of many outdoor shines and parks.



### How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

I grew up with my grandfather who re-told stories of the Japanese bombing his parents' house (my great-grandparents) in the 1930s when Japan invaded China. My early thoughts of visiting Japan as a child were distant in nature. However, as I grew up in a multinational community, I began to love Japanese food and admired innovative Japanese technology.

I am grateful that the Hollick fund has given me a chance to explore Japan in person. Japan is vastly different from China on many levels, but on some cultural aspects, it is very similar and both countries share common Asian values of: respecting the elderly, paying respects in temples/shrines, honouring the arts of food and art. This project has encouraged personal growth, open-thinking and cultural understanding.

Since Japan's re-birth post-World War II, it has learned a great deal from the West in terms of capitalism and innovation. At the same time, the nation has taught the West the art of lean manufacturing, high quality standards and running the most efficient subway system in the world. These are the same 'process innovations' that we study daily in the Department of Engineering (Institute for Manufacturing). This project has assisted my on-the-ground understanding of Japanese innovation.

In addition, I am grateful to have explored Japan with a fellow Johnian and made connections with other academic graduate students abroad. I will continue to share my enthusiasm for Japan with other fellow Cambridge students in the 'West' and encourage future cross-cultural collaborations and learning.

# 'Studying glacier surface characteristics on Midtre Lovenbreen'

by Jon Peatman

**Location:** Ny Elesund, Svalbard, Norway

**Award:** Frank Hollick Fund

**Dates:** 21 July – 10 August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

Ny Elesund is located on the west coast of Spitsbergen, the largest island of the Svalbard archipelago. At 79° North, the sun doesn't set for over 4 months in the summer and the area is plunged in polar night during the winter. Although the constant daylight, with barely any difference between midday and midnight, took some getting used to, the novelty of going for a midnight walk around the station never wore off, and it was actually harder to adjust to night-time once I returned than the lack of it whilst I was away.

Our research on Midtre Lovenbreen was split into three areas. My own research was into how the roughness of the ice surface varied over glacier. Preliminary analysis shows that the surface is rougher towards the snout of the glacier and also that it is rougher perpendicular to the direction of the surface slope, due in part to the action of melt water flowing over the surface. I was also assisting a PhD student with his research, measuring the spectral characteristics (essentially the 'colour') of the ice surface in its different forms (ice, snow, firn) so that the state of a glacier can be investigated from aerial and satellite photography. Finally, whenever we were on the glacier we recorded a GPS log

of our position and used this to measure how much the glacier has retreated since 2005, when the last data was collected, the results from this part of the fieldwork show that the glacier is retreating at approximately the same rate as it has been past decade.

The community at Ny Elesund has a very rich history, since 1968 it has been an international research centre but before that it was a coal mining town and a staging post for arctic expeditions. The coal mining ended abruptly in 1962 after a string of accidents in the mine which claimed the lives of 71 lives from 1945 - 1962, the resulting scandal led to the resignation of the Norwegian Prime Minister and set the political atmosphere for the second half of the 20th Century. Roald Amundsen launched both of his attempts to fly to the North Pole in the 1920s from Ny Elesund and the mooring mast for the airship Norge, which carried him over the North Pole to Alaska, still stands in the tundra just outside the station. The long light evenings gave a good opportunity to explore the area around the village and learn more about the history of such a small community that has played a major role in Norway's history.

The area also has a wide variety of wildlife, despite the lack of vegetation, only 10% of the land area is vegetated, the majority being covered in snow and ice. Arctic terns and barnacle geese nest in the relative safety of the village, though the terns viciously attacked anyone who strayed too close to their chicks, and arctic foxes had spotted the opportunity and set up a den under one of the cabins. Also Svalbard reindeer grazed the tundra on the shore of the fjord on our route from the research station to the glacier.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

My highlight of the trip is a close call between two events. The first occurred as we were eating dinner, when a story spread through the cookhouse and everyone abandoned their meals to race to the quay: beluga whales





had been spotted entering the fjord. Sure enough, a pod of about 100 white whales were swimming serenely up the fjord, dipping below the surface before re-emerging with a spray of water. Having spent some time exploring the fjord they then swam out again, but this time within 50m of the quay, swimming past in groups, totally oblivious to the fact that every member of the research station was watching spell bound from the shore.

But my favourite part of the trip was the afternoon that we spent exploring the calving fronts of the glaciers that

fed directly into the fjords. As we steered the boat through the intense blue and impossibly balanced icebergs which were created as we watched with a deafening crack as they split from the sheer ice walls that surrounded the fjord, seals watched us intently from the water then losing interest dived into the underwater ice maze formed by the icebergs and puffins and fulmars raced past the boat, skimming their wingtips over the water.

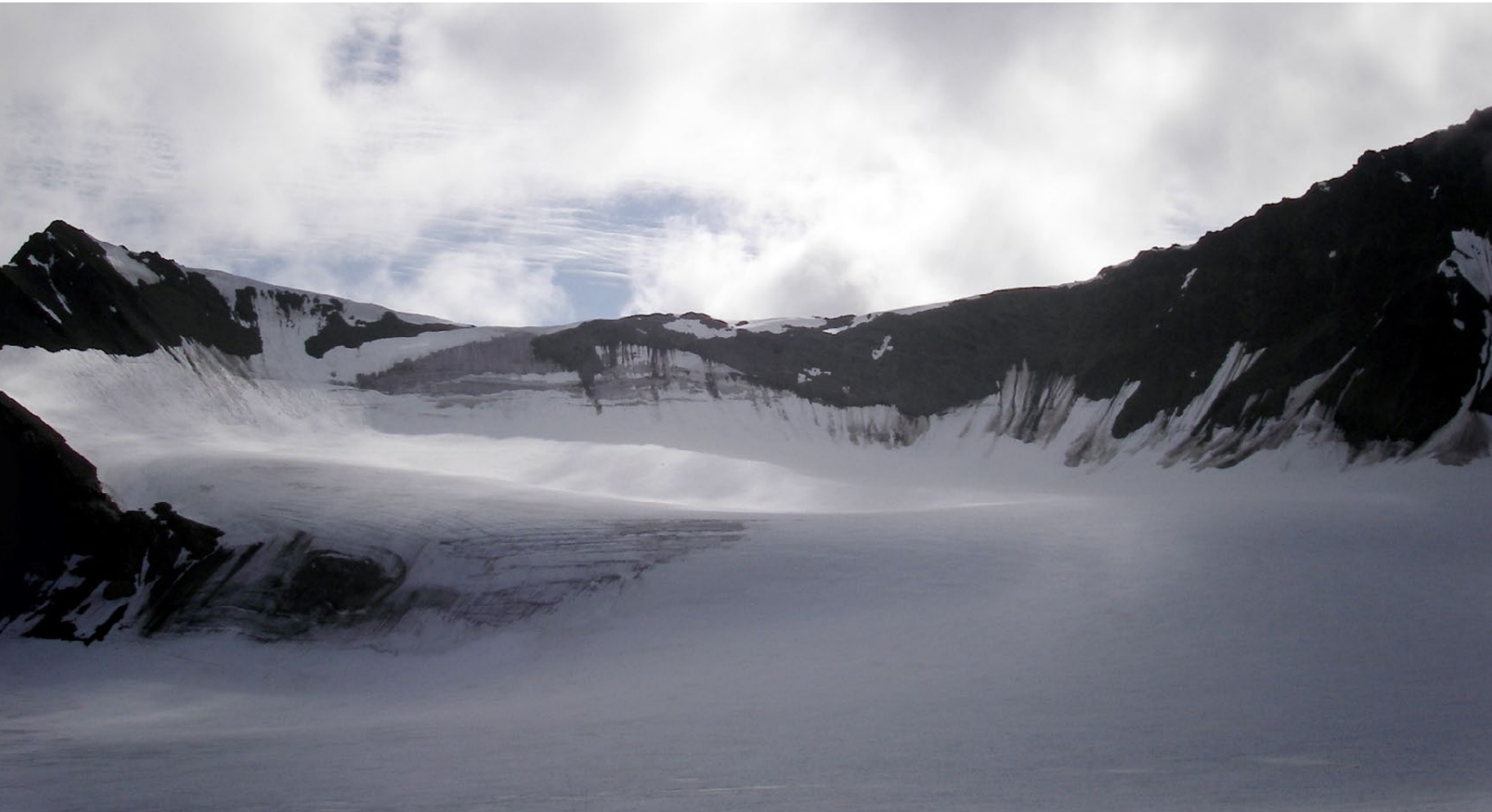


What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The human population of the Svalbard archipelago is approximately 3000. The islands and the surrounding sea ice are also home to the same number of polar bears, and whilst most are found in the north-eastern areas, there were a number of sightings whilst we were there and also some incidents where people had been injured by bears elsewhere in the archipelago, so whenever we left the village, we had to carry a flare gun and rifle to be used

as a last resort only. The thought of potentially having to kill a polar bear was really quite uncomfortable, not only because the species is under huge environmental pressure anyway, with a rapidly shrinking habitat, but also because Svalbard has been home to the polar bears for far longer than the few hundred years that humans have inhabited the islands.

One other part of the trip which was quite challenging was minimising our impact on the very fragile environment; the tundra is so delicate that footprints and tyre







tracks are still visible decades after the damage is caused and the glacier itself, one of the most studied glaciers in the world, is littered with the detritus of previous research.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

The fieldwork from the trip has provided me with far more than just the data for my Part II dissertation. The opportunity to spend an extended period of time working on a glacier and investigating the processes that I have studied over the past year and will continue to study next year has greatly improved my understanding in this area. Also living with scientists from a very diverse range of subject areas in a dynamic scientific community has provided an excellent overview of the very interesting research that is conducted in the polar regions, from studies of the local goose and tern populations to a microwave telescope which measures the tectonic movement in the area and could be used to predict earthquakes.

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My trip to Svalbard was certainly a trip of lifetime and I wouldn't have been able to have enjoyed such a valuable and amazing experience without the generous assistance of the Frank Hollick Fund.

# 'Geological Mapping Project in Chile and South American Travels'

by Robert Emberson

**Location:** Chile, Near Vallenar

**Award:** Johnian Society Travel Exhibitions

**Dates:** 9 July – 2 October 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

The project itself consisted of spending 6 weeks mapping the geology in an area around 40 square kilometres in Northern Chile. This involved recording the relevant rock types and structures in the area, for the purposes of expanding local knowledge of the area and also for the possible economic exploitation of the mineral riches that exist in the area. I also served as the field work for our 3rd year equivalent of a dissertation for geosciences.

The remainder of the twelve weeks was spent travelling in Bolivia and Peru, wherein we visited archaeological sites, climbed mountains, kayaked rivers, and trekked in all terrains from altiplano to jungle.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

The opportunity to visit places so far removed from life as I am used to it fascinated me. The local people in the village we worked in were very welcoming. The unbelievable variety of different environments within Bolivia and Peru never ceased to amaze. What I think I appreciated most however was the fact that the area where we worked

had nothing short of textbook level geology, and it was a privilege to work there.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The very physical nature of the project was demanding. Every day for 6 weeks we would essentially walk 20km with at least an elevation change of 1km, which given that we were already at a not inconsiderable altitude meant that we were pushed quite hard from day one. The terrain itself was not forgiving either, with extensive scree slopes. We had thought that our rudimentary Spanish would be a stumbling block, but in actuality we were okay; given that the standard of education in Chile is very high, there were several people locally who had at least a basic English knowledge.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

The beautiful structures and clearly distinguishable rock types meant that the written project that we can create from the fieldwork undertaken can be of a very high standard. This is currently being undertaken. Spurred on by a basic learning of Spanish whilst we were there, several of the group (myself included) are now taking CULP Spanish lessons, to consolidate and improve our level.

# 'Exploring New Hampshire'

by Georgina Blake

**Location:** New Hampshire, USA

**Award:** Johnian Society Travel Exhibitions

**Dates:** 5 – 18 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

After several unforeseen circumstances and family problems the original plan for the trip was altered from visiting Glacier National Park to exploring New Hampshire. This involved staying in a very primitive log cabin on an island in a lake in a remote region of the state. The only way to access the island was using a dug out canoe. The trip was spent exploring the area by bicycle and hiking on the surrounding trails.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the project was being able to see so much of the beautiful scenery of the area- it was mainly densely wooded with large, unspoilt lakes and intermittently small villages with classic New England architecture. I found one of the most essential and some may say mundane tasks of collecting water very enjoyable. This involved paddling in the canoe across several interconnected lakes to a natural spring where we were able to collect water. A further highlight was developing camp cooking skills - having never cooked on an open fire before this was a steep learning curve but we produced lots of good meals.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

One challenge was reorganising the trip a short notice when circumstances were uncertain and continually changing. Travelling to New Hampshire from Washington DC, without a car, relying solely on public transport, cycling and our own two feet, was also difficult as transport links to the remote area where we were staying, far from major cities, were sparse to say the least.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

I learnt a lot about independent travel and making the most of what seems like a bad situation. Despite the trip not following the original plan I had a great deal of fun and my organisational skills definitely improved since the trip. I also redeveloped a love of cycling, a hobby I had enjoyed when I was younger but had drifted away from. I think I will definitely try to continue this back home.

# 'Where East Meets West: Examining the Integration and Juxtaposition of Traditional Japanese and Western Cultural Ideals in Tokyo'

by Priyanka Narayan

**Location:** Tokyo, Japan

**Award:** Johnian Society Travel Exhibitions

**Dates:** 3 – 8 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

In our time in Tokyo, Julia Li and I explored neighbourhoods in 8 of the 23 'special-wards' of Tokyo. We picked a diverse set of wards and neighbourhoods so that we could obtain a variety of experiences within Tokyo. We stayed near Waseda University and had the opportunity to dine with some students there which gave us some insight into student life in Tokyo. As Tokyo is famous for its commercial culture, we explored neighbourhoods that were noted for this—Ikebukuro and Ginza. We enjoyed learning about the avant-garde fashion and food in Harajuku.

We examined the expansion of Tokyo beyond its traditional city limits by visiting Odaiba, a new manmade island off the coast of the traditional City. As Tokyo is a very ancient city, we also explored more of the 'Old-City' Tokyo which had more traditional Japanese culture. We visited a Meiji-Jingu Shinto Shrine and saw traditional Japanese wedding ceremonies. We also visited Buddhist temples and ancient arts and craft exhibits in the Asakusa

and Ueno neighbourhoods. Interested in Tokyo's strong business infrastructure and work ethic, we spent some time in the more corporate areas such as Otemachi and Shinjuku observing the daily proceedings of the Tokyo 'salary-man'. Interestingly enough, Shinjuku (and increasingly, Otemachi) are culture centres as well and experience a daily 'day-night' transformation between corporate centres into cultural Mecca. To see more of the 'industrial' portion of Tokyo, we visited the age-old Tsukiji fish market (largest in the world) and watched the early-morning bustle there.

We focused our study on art (fashion, architectural design, food) and cultural values of the Japanese in Tokyo and how they reflected either a juxtaposition or integration of eastern and western ideals or both. Though both integration and juxtaposition existed all over Tokyo, we observed in various spheres of society that there was another alternative to juxtaposition or integration—a 'modern Japanese' cultural identity. Although the western influence is pronounced in nearly all spheres of Tokyo culture (from McDonalds and Starbucks to jeans and suits) and though there is juxtaposition and integration (there is a pork-katsu burger in McDonalds!) in many of these areas, we realised that often 'modern' does not just mean western. 'Modern-Japanese' has its own, unique cultural identity that has maintained strong ties to ancient culture. For example, the attention to detail and meticulous nature that pervaded ancient architecture and crafts has been brought to present day in the art of food presentation and Franco-Japanese cuisine. Emphasis on femininity that was seen in the ancient geisha art forms has been updated to the porcelain-doll-like 'harajuku' girl style and the extremely feminine nature of western fashion worn by Japanese women.

Both Julia and I really enjoyed exploring Tokyo through this lens of understanding how 'western' culture and style has manifested itself in this Asian metropolis.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Having been only vaguely familiar with Japanese cuisine and style of dining, I think one of the most interesting experiences for me was experiencing the variety of Japanese cuisine. From the more notable sushi and ramen to the less well-known, okonomiyaki (Japanese do-it-yourself pancakes) and shabu-shabu (cook-it-yourself meats and vegetables in a soymilk broth), I really relished the culinary experiences. Additionally, since I am an avid baker, I really enjoy sampling desserts from various countries. One of my favourites was the goma-suri dango, soft rice-flour balls steamed and skewered, coated with a light caramel-like syrup and dipped in black sesame powder.



I also really enjoy exploring how fashion in various countries has evolved to incorporate various elements of their traditional fashion as well as worldwide trends. In Tokyo, I found a very unique blend of traditional Japanese femininity and propriety into

the new type of ‘harajuku’ style—this is thought to look ‘porcelain-doll’-like. This was very different from the strong, androgynous, militaristic fashion trends that are concurrently prevalent in the Europe and the US.

### What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

There were two aspects of travel that were especially challenging for me—the first was communication. Since neither Julia nor I had much knowledge of Japanese prior to this trip, it was very difficult for us to communicate basic things with many everyday citizens. Of course, younger

people tended to have some knowledge of English, but overall, all business is conducted in Japanese. However, once we realised (very shortly into our trip) how helpful and willing to assist everyone seemed to be, we could use a combination of English, pointing and gesturing to go about our activities in a reasonably successful way.

The other challenging aspect was being vegetarian in Tokyo. This was in part due to inability to communicate my food restrictions. (That was solved when we dined with native Japanese speakers—bilingual students living in Tokyo.) Additionally, a lot of Japanese cuisine is seafood-based. If I had been open to eating various non-Japanese cuisines, then it would not have been nearly as difficult but since I chose to explore (as much as I could) traditional Japanese cuisine, I spent a lot of time investigating what was in certain dishes before eating. This is, in a way, a self-imposed challenge, but nevertheless it is one that I have found more difficult in Japan than in most other places in the world where I have travelled (India, China, and Western Europe).

### How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

I am a strong believer in the power of intercultural exchange. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, being able to understand the diversity of cultural experiences is vital to develop the new century’s ‘global citizen.’ I will share my new knowledge and appreciation for the Japanese people, the language, culture, cuisine, and art to hopefully inform others of the uniqueness of that nation.

I have also made some connections with fellow students which will aid me in maintaining a global network of academics and career professionals with common goals and mutual understanding.



# 'Exploring The Cultural and Natural Landscape of Brazil'

by Rahul Rose

**Location:** Brazil

**Award:** Johnian Society Travel Exhibitions

**Dates:** 13 August – 16 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I landed in Rio de Janeiro, and after staying in the city for several days, I began travelling by coaches and local buses along the Southern coast of Brazil. Strwn along this stretch of coast there are numerous sub-tropical coves, and small colonial towns, like Paraty, with quaint baroque churches. After a week or so of travelling I reached the contrasting surroundings of Sao Paulo, a sprawling, chaotic metropolis. From here I took a long coach ride to the Iguacu falls, which straddle the Brazil-Argentine border. I reached Salvador, a colourful city where Angolan and European cultures have mixed to produce a frenetic hybrid space, some five days later. Over the next few weeks I travelled along the vast Northeast coastline, often camping on uninhabited beaches, until I reached the decaying colonial town of Sao Luis. After several days rest, I embarked upon a 30 hour coach journey, which took me into the Amazon jungle. Using kayak I explored this region further, before taking a flight back to Rio.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Rio de Janeiro was particularly enjoyable. It is one of those rare cities where one is struck by an urgent, electric





atmosphere immediately upon arrival. Indeed, while the spectacular natural landscape is often mentioned as being the city's defining feature, I found the effervescence of its people more endearing. The other part of the trip that most appealed to me was visiting the Amazon. The rainforest seemed an almost magical landscape: at night the whispering of trees and the human sounding bird calls gave the jungle an animate, eerie feel. Dr. Harris, my guide/teacher, was particularly illuminating, helping me understand the complex interplay of ecological, indigenous and state structures, which characterise the Amazon region.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

My meagre knowledge of Portuguese was an initial challenge. It hindered ease of travel in the Northeast, particularly as the accent and pronunciations of words differed greatly from Rio. This meant that much of what I had learnt earlier was now obsolete. However, I must say that immersion in an alien environment and language is the most effective way to learn about it. And so, after a few weeks I was able to get by, albeit somewhat clumsily. The other challenge was travelling alone. After my friend flew back to England, I was by myself and without access to youth hostels, where one can meet fellow travellers. In addition, the area around Sao Luis is very remote and without any substantial tourist infrastructure. Here people often spoke languages other than Portuguese or in unrecognisable dialects to the untrained ear. This part of the trip was particularly taxing.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

My trip to Brazil obviously articulates well with social anthropology. Visiting the sugar growing 'Zona de Mata' of the North enabled me to directly evaluate key ethnographic studies, like Nancy Scheper-Hughes' 'Death Without Weeping' or Mintz's historical monograph 'Sweetness and Power'. And of course, The Amazon region is a focal point for anthropology, be it previous theories, like Levi-Strauss's brand of structuralism, or new theoretical narratives, like perspectivalism. Despite Brazil's central position in the anthropological psyche, I think the trip was most important in aiding my personal development. The linguistic, cultural and individual challenges encountered while travelling gave me a more realistic perspective on the limits and rewards of short trips abroad.



# 'Volunteering and Cultural Exchange in Kutwa, Thailand'

**Location:** Kutwa, Thailand

**Award:** Johnian Society, C W Brasher & C Vincent Fund

This volunteering and cultural exchange project was undertaken by a group of seven students. Their individual reports follow:

by Shane Dooley

Dates: 1 – 15 September 2010

**Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.**

We visited the town of Kutwa in Kalasin province in north eastern Thailand. This is the hometown of Jeng Rongchai, one of our group of Johnians. Here we visited three local schools. In each school, we gave a Power-Point presentation to students between the ages of 9 and 16. The presentation contained information about our home countries (four countries were represented), about ourselves, and about our subjects of study in Cambridge. Each presentation - translated by Jeng - was followed with questions from the students. We also donated books (in Thai and English) to each of the schools.

**What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?**

It was my first time to Asia and I particularly enjoyed the first hand experience of Eastern culture. The language, the food, and the religion were all very different to our Western versions, but it is the small things that stood out

most for me: the cinema, the pop music, the reverence for the king, the chaos of Bangkok, and the simplicity of life in Kutwa.

In Kutwa we were invited to take part in local traditional ceremonies. Western tourists rarely go to Kutwa and the welcome that we were given was something that I enjoyed. Because of the interest and enthusiasm of the students we spoke to, our visits to the schools were also very enjoyable. And it was a great experience to be able to see first hand their evident appreciation for the books that we donated.

**What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?**

The public speaking in the schools was a challenge. Communication in general was a challenge since Jeng was required to translate anything that we said. Even day to day activities, e.g. asking for directions, or buying bus tickets was difficult when we were not accompanied by Jeng. I tried to learn a few phrases of Thai but it was not easy especially since the alphabet is different to our Roman alphabet.

**How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?**

This project has assisted my personal development by broadening my range of experience. Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how, I feel like I came home a slightly different person to the one who left.

I've got lots of great memories, new friends, and closer friendships with the people I travelled with, as well as a better appreciation for South East Asian culture and history.

## by Terence Farrelly

Dates: 30 August – 21 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

In Kutwa we visited three schools to talk to the students and to donate books we had bought and collected from Oxfam. We told them about what we do in Cambridge and where we come from. We encouraged them to ask us questions and talk to us. We also were invited to the local temple to talk to the people of the village and on another occasion to take part in a Buddhist ceremony. Earlier we visited the Island of Ko Samed and afterwards Erawan National Park.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Meeting the people and children who were extremely welcoming and friendly was a wonderful experience. Taking part in a ceremonial dance around the temple was very interesting (our dancing amused the village people). Learning about the culture and the way Thai people act was enlightening.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

Talking to the children was difficult because I wanted to tell them interesting things and give them some help learning English at the same time. Speaking in front of large audiences was also daunting.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

It allowed me to experience a very different culture.

It opened my eyes to a very relaxed way of life. I was inspired by the easy going (but not lazy!) way in which some of the people that I encountered lived. I had not done volunteer work before but after our trip I would definitely try to do some again.

~

I would like to thank everyone who enabled us to go on this trip; I learned a lot about Thai people, their culture and a small bit of their language. I hope that we were able to make some contribution to the schools we visited. If it weren't for the generosity of the people who donated funds to the College I would not have been able to afford such a wonderful opportunity.

## by Aquila Mavalankar

Dates: 1 – 16 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

The primary aim of this project was interacting with school children at local schools in the village of Kutwa in the North East of Thailand. We visited three schools during our stay. Two of the schools were small, and did not have very good infrastructure. Our group had prepared an hour long presentation for the school children. We talked to them about our countries of origin, life as a student at Cambridge, and about our research, particularly in physics. We then interacted with the children personally in a question-answer round, and played games with the younger children. We had also contributed a bit of money each, and purchased books and games for the children from book stores in Cambridge and Bangkok. We spent some time telling the children about the books, and playing some English learning games with them.

During our visit we were hosted by a local family, and closely interacted with the local community. We attended a local Buddhist festival - the Puong Ma Lai festival, and addressed the local community at the event. We attended two more Buddhist services related to the festival. It was very interesting to observe an ages old Buddhist service, and the related folk music and dancing. We also observed the manufacture of local handicrafts like hand-woven cotton and silk. At the end of our stay, a spare few days allowed us to fit in a short trip to Cambodia, where we saw the famous Angkor Wat temple complex, a World Heritage site.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I enjoyed interacting with the younger school children immensely. The children were bright, attentive, and eager to listen to what we shared. Playing English language games with the children was a heart-warming experience.

I also enjoyed the simplicity of village life. The local community as a whole, and our hosts in particular made us feel very welcome, and were eager to include us in their traditions. Most people in Thailand speak very little English, but answered our questions about their culture and customs to the best of their ability. It was interesting to participate in this dialogue between cultures.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

Although interacting with school children was very rewarding, it was also a challenge communicating with them, not only because they were very young and from a different culture, but also because their knowledge of English was rudimentary. We therefore relied on a translator to tell them what we were saying, practically line by line.

I also found travelling in Thailand physically demanding. It was also difficult to organise travel plans because we didn't speak the local language, and public transport could be unreliable.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

This experience made me think about the relevance of my current work, and possible career paths after my PhD. Although I find my current research and my life in Cambridge very satisfying, I started to think about the contribution I can make to less privileged societies.

by Gemma Murray

Dates: 18 August – 16 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

During my month in Thailand I spent my first two weeks volunteering at the Wildlife Friends of Thailand Animal Rescue Centre in Petchaburi. I worked mainly with the elephants at the centre, performing the daily activities of feeding, watering and bathing the elephants, and cleaning their enclosures. I also went on safari, to see elephants in the wild, and went to local farms to harvest food for the elephants.

After I left the centre I met up with the other members of my group in Bangkok. We spent one day in Bangkok visiting the palace and local markets. We then travelled to Ko Samed Island where we spent 3 days before making the journey to Kutwa in the North-East of Thailand. We spent 5 days in this village, hosted by Kanchit Rongchai's (a member of our group) family. During our time there we visited 3 local schools, attended a number of local ceremonies, and travelled around the area. After this, two other members of my group and I travelled to Siem Reap in Cambodia to visit the temple of Angkor Wat. We then joined up with the rest of the group in Bangkok, where we spent a couple of days before travelling home.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I enjoyed staying in Kutwa with my friend's family. His family and neighbours were extremely welcoming and we were made to feel like part of the community. Through staying in this relatively remote area of Thailand and through visiting local schools I felt that we were able to experience Thai culture in a way that the ordinary tourist

would not. I enjoyed experiencing a very different way of life in a very different environment.

I also enjoyed working with the elephants in the Rescue Centre. It was often hard work, but it was highly rewarding to work with such fascinating animals, especially after learning about how terrible their lives had been before being taken in by the centre. It was inspiring to see how much had been achieved by a small group of people. I also felt I learnt a lot about conservation work and wild animals more generally.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The weather was one of the most challenging aspects of travelling in Thailand at the time of year we went. It was very hot and humid. This meant that travelling and day to day activities could be made pretty uncomfortable.

Travelling by buses and taxis, sometimes alone, could be stressful due to the language barrier.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

This trip was a fantastic experience. It was the first time I have travelled outside of Europe and North America and so it gave me insight into a very different environment and culture. The trip broadened my cultural horizons. I now hope to travel more and feel more confident in my ability to do so. The work I did and the travelling could often be stressful, difficult or unpleasant, in overcoming these stresses and difficulties I feel that I have developed personally as a result of this trip.

by Sam Palmer

Dates: August - September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

We visited three schools in the vicinity of Kutwa, Thailand, the hometown of one of our group, Jeng Rongchai. We gave presentations about where we were from, our interests and what we studied. We answered questions and played with the children.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I enjoyed seeing how happy everyone was in what is considered the poorest part of Thailand.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

This was certainly not a very challenging project, in fact everything was very easy and we were welcomed enthusiastically. Sometimes communication was difficult but this was rare as we had Jeng with us.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

Visiting south-east Asia surely has a relaxing and meditative effect on anyone, on top of this it was rewarding to inspire the children there.

by Kanchit Rongchai

Dates: 1 – 16 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I initiated and organised a cultural and volunteering visit to Kutwa, a small traditional Phu-Thai town in the Northeast of Thailand in which I was born and grew up. About six months before the project took place, I liaised with the community and two local primary schools in Kutwa about a visit by a group of students from St John's College. I taught the group some basic language and useful information about the cultures and way of lives of the Phu-Thai tribe in Kutwa. During the time there, I was an interpreter between the group and the locals. I communicated with the group and teachers in the schools about activities we would like to do with the children. The group stayed with my family, so I helped my parents to host them in a traditional Phu-Thai style.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Amongst others, what I enjoyed the most was being a medium between with the community and the group. I was most impressed by the smiles, happiness and sense of achievement that both parties displayed.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The most challenging part of the project was the organisation process. However, I enjoy challenges, so it was not at all a negative part.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?



The project is not directly related to my studies. However, it has given me a strong sense of success. I have developed useful communication skills, interpersonal relationships, cultural awareness and problem solving which are very useful for my studies and professional life.

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The project was highly successful. I regret that we were not able to stay there longer because Kutwa was a very culturally rich and friendly community. There are many interesting cultural events taking place in Kutwa which have the potential for tourism industry and could bring employment to the community. It is hoped that the group's visit was as beneficial to the community as much as it was for us. I would like to organise another similar trip to Kutwa again.





## by Marcel Schmittfull

Dates: 31 August – 16 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

During our trip to Thailand we visited three schools near Jeng Rongchai's home village Kutwa in Kalasin province in the north east of Thailand. At each school we presented our home countries and our research interests to the school children (in groups of about 20 to 100 children). We firstly described the culture and habits of our home countries (England, Ireland, Germany and India) using photos, which was very interesting for the school children. Simplified according to the age of the audience, we presented our research work which gave inspiration to the school children and raised their interest in science. Finally we answered the children's questions about our home countries and our studies. We donated a lot of English and Thai books and some games to two of the schools to improve their English skills and to teach them about science. The children were very happy and grateful about the interactive presentations and our presents.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

The interaction with the school children during and after the presentations was definitely what I enjoyed most. It was amazing to see so many happy and open-minded children, who were interested in almost everything and were smiling and laughing a lot. I really enjoyed talking with the children and answering their questions. I also enjoyed hearing that many of the children are very ambitious about their future: many of them want to become teachers, nurses, engineers or doctors.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The most challenging aspect was probably to get used to every-day living in Thailand. Since I had not been to Asia before it was hard to get used to the heat and the food in the beginning. But after a few days I got used to it and really enjoyed my time in Thailand.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

The project was very important for my personal development because I have experienced how people are living in a relatively remote area in Thailand. We lived together with the local people in the village of Kutwa and took part in their everyday lives, which would not have been possible without Jeng Rongchai's help. The people were very friendly to us 'foreigners' and welcomed us with great warmth and friendliness. I was surprised to see how few things are necessary for people to be happy, maybe happier than average Europeans. Somehow I felt that many problems, which people in Europe are complaining about, are actually no serious problems and that we should really appreciate the high living standards we sometimes take for granted.

I was also surprised to see how happy the school children were when they realised that their English education in school gives them the ability to communicate with foreigners. The children were eager to learn as much as possible and were listening carefully to every word we said. But not only they enjoyed learning, it was actually also great fun for me and the others to explain the children whatever they wanted to know! Thus, visiting the schools broadened not only the school children's horizons, but it also broadened our horizons as we realised how important and interesting teaching can be.





# 'Culture of Cambodia'

by Claire Mason

**Location:** Cambodia

**Award:** Peter Allan Travel Award

**Dates:** 16 July – 16 August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I spent a wonderful month this summer exploring the history, countryside and culture of Cambodia. Along the way I met interesting people and discovered how resilient and optimistic a population can be.

I began my month in the town of Siem Reap, a base for visiting the 12th to 14th century temples of Angkor and the surrounding complexes. The temples were magnificent and the grandeur and technological prowess of the Khmer empire, as shown, for example, by their unique irrigation systems, was very impressive. The mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism was also interesting and is still very much engrained in Khmer culture, and can also be observed in the more modern temples such as those I visited in Kampong Cham, as well as the 8th century temples of Kampong Thom.

From Siem Reap, I travelled by bus to Battambang, the second city of Cambodia, from where I went on several motor-biking trips to the surrounding countryside, temples and caves. The scenery was stunning: bright green rice fields, bright blue skies, and the bright orange robes of the monks. Whilst there I learnt to ride a motorbike and took a bamboo train! I also visited the fish market where the fermented fish paste present in so many Cambodian dishes is made (it was pungent), and artisans who made boats, rice pancakes, cigarettes, incense sticks and sticky rice

cakes. So much of Cambodian life depends on rice, so the rainy season is vital. This year it started late, which may lead to hardship.

Next I travelled to Kampong Chnang, where I saw the pottery village and took a tour round the floating village, and was invited to meet my guide's lovely family. From there I went down to the South coast at Kep, and visited the old French colonial town of Kampot and the nearby Bakor hill station, a eerie abandoned hotel and casino used as a base by the Khmer Rouge. With a friend, I went to the wild North East of Cambodia, Ratanakiri Province, where we trekked and camped for two days in the jungle, and swam in glittering waterfalls and crater lakes. We also went to see the endangered Irrawaddy Mekong dolphins, islands and pagodas near Kratie. I then went down to Mondulakiri, where I rode on and bathed with elephants and saw some breathtaking sunsets and cascades. Several NGOs are trying to protect the Cambodian wildlife, but this is difficult when faced with poachers and large commercial companies who want to use the land to build factories and casinos, offering large short-term profits.

The villagers in the countryside in the East, many from minority races, were the poorest I met in Cambodia. However, they have wooden houses and enough food and are not poor relative to their neighbours, since there were no richer people around, and they seemed happy and were very welcoming.

The capital, Phnom Penh, is a bustling dusty, noisy city with lively markets, but it also has some beautiful, peaceful green areas where aerobics and dance classes take place in the evenings. It was a fascinating place to walk around. While I was there I visited the Royal Palace and National Museum and watched some classical Cambodian dancing, which, like the music and architecture, shows both Chinese and Indian influences.

The experience that most affected me during my stay

was visiting the Killing Fields and S21, the prison where prisoners were kept and tortured by the Khmer Rouge before they were killed. There were photographs there of children; both victims and the brainwashed perpetrators of these atrocities. It was horrific to think how recent these events were, and deeply moving. Many people I had met - moto tuk-tuk drivers, people waiting for the bus - had related their terrible experiences of the Khmer Rouge regime to me.

However, what struck me most was the amazing capacity for forgiveness that the Khmers have shown; there has not been retribution or cries for revenge. The country has still not recovered as the massacre of intellectuals means that education is poor and healthcare, though not a basic as in Uganda for example, is largely dependent on foreign doctors. However, the friendly, good-humoured people and the wonderful community spirit that I encountered throughout my travels in Cambodia are, I think, a testimony to the amazing ability of people to recover after disasters, and the richness of the Khmer civilisation.

[What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?](#)

I enjoyed the beautiful scenery and the wild jungle very much, and also learning about the ancient and more recent history of the country. I also very much enjoyed wandering around the lively, noisy markets. The most enjoyable experience, however, was meeting the very hospitable people of Cambodia. They were very welcoming, willing to teach me about their culture and keen to show me all the beauties of their country.

[What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?](#)

Visiting the old Khmer Rouge prison was extremely moving, as was hearing people's accounts of what they endured under the Khmer Rouge. It was difficult to rec-

oncile the friendliness and community spirit that I found everywhere with the atrocities that some of the same people were responsible for only 30 years ago.

I also had a few problems communicating with my very rudimentary Khmer, making getting off the bus at the right place sometimes difficult!

[How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?](#)

Travelling alone is a formative experience, as it teaches you to rely on your own resourcefulness and ability to communicate with others. However, it also allowed me to meet a lot of interesting people, Cambodians and fellow travellers, and I will remember their words of advice and their attitudes. I especially feel that the Cambodians' ability to forgive and survive without bitterness is exemplary.

I was not able to visit the hospital in Siem Reap as I hoped, but I did learn, through talking to people, about healthcare in Cambodia, which has suffered greatly through the loss of many of the country's educated people.

# 'Archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean'

by Charles Draper

**Location:** Croatia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Serbia, Romania, Ukraine

**Award:** Robert Sloley Fund

**Dates:** July – October 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

Over the Long Vacation I undertook travel to improve my understanding of the history, culture and archaeology of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. I began my vacation by using my spare time to plan and research my trip. This research, coupled with the College's generosity, allowed me to undertake travel that exceeded my initial expectations – in all I spent three months abroad, visiting seven countries and assisting on a month-long archaeological excavation on the Croatian Island of Korcula. Between August and October, I travelled from central Ukraine to South-West Turkey, passing through Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, visiting sites of archaeological and cultural significance, particularly those associated with pre-classical archaeology. I then spent two weeks in Southern Turkey, exploring the Graeco-Roman sites of Ancient Lycia, before flying to Croatia to assist Dr Miracle's excavation at the

site of Vela Luka, one of the most important prehistoric sites in the Mediterranean. In the week following the excavation, I travelled to Dubrovnik and Sarajevo, before returning to England in time to return to Cambridge.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

The travel I undertook in Eastern Europe took me to some of the most fascinating, beautiful, and haunting places I have ever visited. In Ukraine, I visited the cliff top fortress city of Kamianets-Podilsky, found a 50ft-high statue of Mother Russia, and saw how archaeology was assisting the reconstruction of Kyiv's historic core. In Romania I saw wild bears, visited the castle where my great-great-









grandfather served as Jaegermeister, and sipped red wine in Sighisoara - Dracula's supposed birthplace. In Bulgaria, I explored Thracian ruins beneath the streets of Sophia, and visited the breathtaking fortress of Veliko Turnovo. In Turkey I visited the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations (the most important museum of Mesopotamian archaeology outside Iraq), and visited the Hittite capital of Hattusa – once the rival of Egypt and Babylon. The excavation in Croatia was an excellent introduction to archaeology outside the classroom, and I thoroughly enjoyed the thrill of digging.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The excavation in Croatia was enjoyable but demanding, both physically and mentally. To begin with, I found the transition from independent travel to high-intensity teamwork challenging, particularly given Cambridge's emphasis on independent study. Nevertheless, working in a foreign environment with unfamiliar people was exciting, and the excavation provided an opportunity to develop and use skills that will set me in good stead for the future. I made new friends, got to work at one of the most important prehistoric sites in Europe, and learnt a great deal (particularly about marine shells!). Most importantly, I now have archaeological experience that I hope to turn to my advantage next summer.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

The project I undertook assisted my studies and personal development enormously. The excavation conducted in Croatia gave me the opportunity to experience all aspects

of the archaeological process, including excavation, documentation, finds processing and lab work, and I feel confident that I could work in any of these environments in the future. The activities I undertook this summer not only united my pre-existing interests in art, architecture, and archaeology, but also fired my interest in unexpected fields, such as urban reconstruction, heritage management, and the challenges associated with adjusting to post-war reality, particularly in the Balkans.



# 'Adaptation to Andean Environments: A Combined Osteometric/Anthropometric Approach'

by Emma Pomeroy

**Location:** Chile, Peru

**Award:** Robert Sloley Fund

**Dates:** 6 April – 4 December 2010

**Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.**

The project involves collecting data for my PhD thesis, and has two major parts. The first concerns archaeological skeletal remains from northern Chile, and involves taking a range of measurements of the skeleton, recording evidence of disease, and taking moulds from the shafts of long bones for behavioural analysis. These archaeological populations are from a range of time periods and of varied lifestyles, and the data collected will be used to assess the impact of social and environmental factors on skeletal morphology. The second part of the project involves collection anthropometric data from children in Lima and Ayacucho, Peru, in order to assess how their body proportions differ at various ages and the social/environmental factors which may influence these patterns.

**What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?**

The archaeological aspect of the project has given me a fascinating first-hand insight into human variation in northern Chile, and has enabled me to begin addressing

some of the questions about these past populations which are of greatest interest to me. Through the anthropometric aspect of the study involving modern populations, I have had the privilege of meeting a wide range of Peruvian families and to gain insight into their lives and the wide range of social, health and economic challenges faced by these communities. More generally the project has provided me with a unique opportunity to spend a number of weeks living in different communities in Chile and Peru, and thus to see a different side of life that visitors would not usually experience.

**What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?**

Managing my time and maximising the information I have been able to obtain within the available timeframe has been challenging. Dealing with various problems as they have arisen has required me to be resourceful and think broadly in order to resolve these issues. Working with modern populations has been a completely new experience for me and I have had to learn a wide range of skills very quickly, both in terms of practical data collection skills, how to deal with research participants, and how to train and manage research staff. The practicalities of travelling alone with large amounts of equipment has certainly been a challenge too.

**How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?**

The data collected during this project forms the basis of my PhD research on past and present adaptation in the Andes of South America. In terms of personal development, I have learned a great deal while carrying out an independent project of this size and duration. I have further developed a variety of skills including time management and scheduling, training and managing research staff, dealing with challenges and problems as they arise, as well as improving my Spanish language skills.

# 'Vulnerability and Risk: The role of green technology'

by Hafsa Bell

**Location:** Uttarakhand, India

**Award:** Roberts Fund

**Dates:** 25 June – 14 July 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

The workshop I attended this summer was run by Architecture Sans Frontieres-UK (ASF-UK) in collaboration with SEEDS India, an NGO. During the first half of the project we familiarised ourselves with and researched the architectural, social and environmental aspects of the area in which we were studying. This involved drawing up and analysing the buildings in our case-study village, interviewing the villagers for insight as to cultural influences on the architecture, exploring the area for its available resources and measuring the sustainability and viability of contemporary and traditional vernacular architecture. In this way we were able to assess the complex issues involved the construction of their buildings, especially with regards to the fact that the area was highly susceptible to earthquakes which the new construction style would not withstand. We then spent the second half of the workshop exploring ideas for responses to an earthquake should it occur, and looking at new sustainable technologies such as compressed earth blocks and bamboo which could replace the brick and concrete which was currently being imported from Bihare and used as the main building material.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

The aspect of the workshop I enjoyed most was being in the village and discovering the beauty and harmony with which the villagers traditionally lived their lives. The village itself was located in a spectacularly beautiful location and it was a wonderful experience to walk through the village and talk with the villagers, and discover how they lived their lives. It was also really interesting researching how to return to the village's once completely sustainable way of life, and share our ideas with the local inhabitants of the area.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

The most challenging element of the project was coming up with something which would genuinely solve the complex issues involved in moving away from the new trends towards something more sustainable. Every solution or idea would have repercussions which would affect the village further down the line, which we needed to follow through with. However, I think everyone involved learnt a lot from the process of exploring all the alternatives.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

The workshop opened up avenues for me in terms of other possibilities for architecture. It allowed me to see a way in which it would be possible to potentially use my degree to help others by facilitating new methods of construction and architectural design. I also learnt so much about the particular customs of the area in which we were working and the surrounding environment and land, and about the deep relationship between the two which I felt was a lesson that could be applied to all my architectural studies.

# 'Beijing's Soho: Culturally led urban regeneration in Beijing's 798 Arts district'

by Stephen Yang

**Location:** Beijing, China

**Award:** Roberts Fund

**Dates:** 7 August – 14 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I conducted 26 in depth interviews, lasting around an hour each, with individuals identified as key players within the development of a small area of about 50,000 square feet in Beijing. Each interview required a different sort of approach as they would be conducted often in different languages (English or mandarin) and given the fact that a wide range of people were spoken to, each with their different backgrounds and areas of expertise, every interview questions would be tailored to an extent. The interviews were arranged and negotiated through constant networking and the 'snowball' effect. Moreover I also conducted participant observation and environmental quality analysis on the areas that I visited in order to discern the current state of the urban area in question.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

I really enjoyed having the opportunity in the field to see how theory is applicable to real life situations and processes. What really interested me was having the chance to speak to people about aspects of Beijing's political economy and urban development and see the similari-

ties and differences of their lived experience in contrast with the theoretical standpoint. I also enjoyed meeting a diverse range of individuals, ranging from government officials, gallery owners and even famous artists, who provided a wide spectrum of perspectives in which to draw information from.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

I found the process of interviewing people the most challenging at the first place due to the fact that I am occasionally less than confident in my oral ability to articulate ideas eloquently and persuasively, especially in my second language of mandarin. Moreover due to the statuses of my interviewees at first it was very difficult to feel comfortable in an environment with them. However, I found that through constant practice and preparation I was able to overcome such difficulties to the extent that these are now no longer problems.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

This project has been integral to helping me conduct research for my Part II dissertation. As for my personal development I feel it has given me the opportunity to hone my organisational, networking, academic and interpersonal communicative abilities in the real world, which has been great.

# 'India beyond Architectural History: Exploring and Understanding'

by Richard Butler

**Location:** India

**Award:** Scullard Fund

**Dates:** 10 - 30 July 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

As a result of a £360 travel fund kindly awarded by St John's College, I was able to travel to India in the summer of 2010 and successfully carry out my proposed trip. I left for India on the 10th of July, for twenty days of seeing, photographing, travelling and enjoying India. Having been in Bombay before, I was accustomed to the specific challenges a Western traveller faces in India: diet, climate and language. I also went in full expectation of occasional hassle from touts and questioning from curious government officials, especially when I took out my camera!

I was fortunate to have made several friends during my earlier research-orientated trip to Bombay, and one of these friends, an Art History graduate from the School of Oriental & African Studies, travelled with me for more than half of my stay in India. As I stated in my application for a travel fund, the purpose of my travels was to become more accustomed with India as a country, its people, customs, food, music, traditions. Despite writing my BA thesis about architecture in Bombay and deciding to concentrate on British colonial architecture in India as my MPhil topic, I felt that I knew very little about the country itself, outside of my somewhat theoretical, academic work. I visited

Delhi, Bombay, Ahmadabad, Ellora and Ajanta and Bijapur during my twenty days in India.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

As someone who enjoys travelling and almost all kinds of transport, simply getting from place to place, and figuring out ways of getting across vast areas of India by train was fascinating. From the comfort of my carriage window I was able to see so much, which complemented the sights that I was actually travelling to see. I particularly enjoyed my visits to the UNESCO World Heritage sites at Ellora and Ajanta, and visiting the old city of Bijapur. Leaving Bombay with an Indian friend of mine, I took a long train journey to Ellora and Ajanta. Here Buddhist, Hindu and Jain sculptures are interspersed in one of the largest cave temple complexes in the world. I had read about these sites in Benjamin Rowland's 'The Art & Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain' and was very excited to see them in person. Bijapur, in the southern state of Karnataka, was the last stop during my time in India. My journey there required several changes of trains (at Aurangabad and Sholapur) as we criss-crossed the rural areas of Maharashtra state. Bijapur is a small city of around a quarter of a million people, but was definitely worth seeing. It boasts a great wealth of 15th to 17th century Mughal architecture. Being smaller and slightly off the 'beaten track', it was also a relaxing end to a busy trip.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

As it was July, I had to work around the regular rainfall. This presented the greatest challenge to me as a traveller - but my schedule was sufficiently loose to allow me to work around the summer's monsoon season. Luckily I was not ill during my stay, was not the victim of any crime, and in my conversations met many interesting and friendly travellers.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

I am exceptionally grateful for the travelling fund which I received from St John's College, as it allowed me to see so much of India and broaden my understanding of a country that I have thus-far devoted much of my academic career to studying and writing about.

# 'Volunteer Teaching and Learning in Siberia'

by Nicola Farnworth

**Location:** Novosibirsk, Russia

**Award:** Scullard Fund

**Dates:** 29 June – 23 August 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

I worked as an international volunteer teacher at the 'Linking the Planet' summer school at Education Centre COSMOPOLITAN, based in Novosibirsk, Russia. The camp provided English language lessons in the morning, and extra-curricular activities in the afternoon and evening (and Russian lessons for me). There were also trips and excursions to such places of interest as the Cathedral of Aleksandr Nevskii, and the Novosibirsk Zoo, which is the largest in Russia.

The theme of the camp was 'Around the World in 14 Days', or 'In the Steps of the Bremen Musicians': it was based on a Russian cartoon in which a band of musicians travelled the world. Every day the camp 'visited' a different country, such as the UK, France, Brazil, China and Greece, and lessons followed these themes, which certainly led to an improvement in my creative skills as a teacher! The ages of the children ranged from 8-17, and levels from absolute beginner to essentially fluent. The focus of the lessons was mainly conversational English, and I used a medley of methods which included (but were not limited to): word games and quizzes, drawing and presenting posters on a specific topic (such as deforestation), debates, question and answer sessions, translations, and writing and acting short scenes. It turned out that discussions of topics



such as Facebook and the Twilight films series were also excellent conversation starters! I also taught one or two French lessons every day; in general, my students were absolute beginners, and so lessons were extremely basic. I taught each student, depending on the schedule, either every day or every other day, and everyone became well-acquainted extremely quickly.

[What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?](#)

Following the theme of the camp, every evening a performance was held depicting the country of the day. The teachers were by no means exempt from this and it was usually up to us to provide comic relief (in Russian). Over the six weeks at the camp I played a multitude of characters including the Queen of England, Elvis Presley (oddly enough, for Eurovision day), a pirate, a snake who was subsequently banished by St Patrick (Ireland day), an Amazonian warrior (Brazil day), and a jealous Russian wife. If required, I can send some photographs for your amusement.

Following the end of the camp, I was lucky enough to be able to stay on in Russia and visit the city of Tomsk and the Altai region. I was accompanied by both Russians from the camp and my Russian-speaking American colleague. Tomsk is not unlike Cambridge, in that it's full of old buildings, fantastic architecture, and students. I met up with some students from the camp there, and they showed me what they considered to be the most important things in the city (my personal favourite was the world's largest one-rouble coin). They also bought me 'the most Russian gift we could think of', which turned out to be an enormous volume of War and Peace, in Russian.

From Tomsk I travelled on to the Altai region, stopping at Lake Teletskoe. This did necessitate spending my entire 21st birthday on a bus, but it was well worth it; the scenery was incredible and nobody spoke English (apart from the

aforementioned American). As a foreigner, and therefore a rarity, I was strong-armed into a variety of activities, including horse-riding, mushroom-picking, rafting, and teaching Russian children how to play Frisbee. Again, this was excellent Russian practice and allowed me to see a different side of Russia to the one I had seen at the camp. I was extremely sad to leave.

[What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?](#)

Every afternoon I taught a 'creativity workshop' in Russian, which lasted for an hour and provided, mainly, a means to further interact with the students. At the end of each week the students presented their projects to the rest of the camp. Other teachers worked on, for example, karate, Irish dancing, origami, and A Short History of the World; my own projects included designing coats of arms, Scottish dancing, and Romeo and Juliet in Five Minutes (which I believe can now be seen on YouTube). Many of the older students were eager to work and present in English, and this was extremely rewarding for me. It also provided an opportunity to get to know many of the children better, and class control provided excellent Russian practice!

[How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?](#)

On a practical note, speaking from Kyiv, Ukraine, the amount of progress made in Russian language has stood me in very good stead for my year abroad, as I now have a solid foundation on which to build. On a personal note, I had a wonderful experience working with, and making a fool out of myself in front of, ninety Russian children on a daily basis, and I feel that as a result (or maybe in spite of!) this I've forged some lasting friendships with both staff and students. I do hope to return to the camp, as there is a winter session which runs in January, and in any case I will definitely return to Novosibirsk and Russia.

# 'Travels to India / Teaching English at Monastery'

by Danae Mercer

**Location:** Dolanji, Himachel Pradesh, India

**Award:** Scullard Fund

**Dates:** 9 August – 12 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

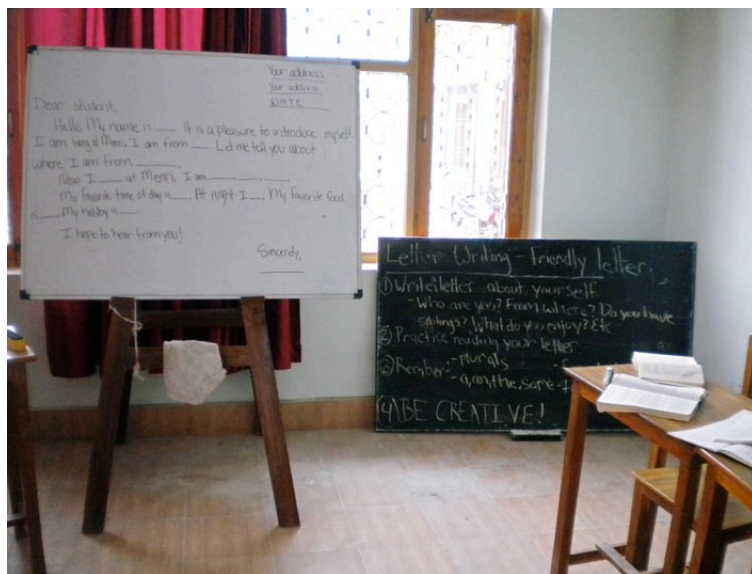
I travelled to Dolanji, India, to teach English at Menri Monastery. Dolanji is a small, isolated town of around 800 people. Over 300 of those are monks, ranging from around 18 to 70 years old. Every day, for at least an hour, I would teach a group of monks (and two nuns!) English. I

also tutored certain monks one-on-one. I also took a week to travel around India, including staying at an ashram in Rishikesh and climbing to the monkey temple in Shimla.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

My students were amazing: fun, energetic, dedicated... they definitely made the project for me. Each day, they would come to class with assignments completed. When I saw them at meals, they would talk about the day's lessons, or ask me to help them with certain words. These students became my friends outside the classroom.

I also enjoyed learning about their various experiences. Most of my students were Tibetan refugees, meaning they had amazing, terrifying stories of how they came to be at Menri. For instance, Chime, a monk, crossed the Himalayas for thirty days through snow, ice and gunfire. He still has scars on his feet where twine from homemade



shoes cut deeply. These monks have had such a different experience of the world.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

I found the isolated nature of Dolanji to be very difficult. The town was small: no shops, no markets, nothing except a little corner store that sold candy and soda to the monks. There was no TV, very spotty internet, and generally no easy-access entertainment. To be all by myself, and to have so much time on my hands, was certainly challenging. It taught me a lot about calming my mind and focusing on the present... but such lessons don't come easily.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

I learned how to teach English (slowly, and with precise enunciation). I learned lesson plans rarely go as planned. I learned that there is something sacred about having freedom to vote, about holding a passport, about being a free citizen with free rights; and I learned that some people fight desperately for these things. As a politics student, the importance of such citizenship was a particularly powerful lesson.

I learned about monks, Bon religion, Buddhism, the life at a monastery, the quiet peace of meditation and the difficulty of finding such peace. Indeed, I think I learned a bit of everything through this project.

~

Thank you immensely for this opportunity.



# 'Community Development Activities with Youth of the Nisga'a First Nation'

by Kayla Kingdon-Bebb

**Location:** Nisga'a Territory, British Columbia, Canada

**Award:** Neil Thomason Award

**Dates:** 1 – 14 September 2010

Briefly describe the activities of the project in which you were involved.

The project consisted of planning and facilitation of three Community Development Workshops with Nisga'a community members (youth) aged 15-25. The aim of the project was to engage Nisga'a youth in assessing community well-being and planning future development projects. The project sought to lay the groundwork for qualitative aspects of my doctoral research and was conducted in collaboration with the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a and Nisga'a Elders.

What were some of the things you enjoyed most about working on the project?

Engaging with Nisga'a youth in a small, collaborative group setting was by far the best part of this project. In my past work in the community I had substantial contact with government and community officials, academics, and Elders; however, outside of the academic environment I had little opportunity to interact with people my age or younger. It has brought new insight to my work to hear the perspectives of young people, not only on their Treaty and the future of community development - but concerning their own personal histories as well.

What aspects of your travel project did you find most challenging?

As always, spending any length of time in a remote Aboriginal community is always personally challenging. One confronts head-on the issues of geographic and social isolation, and occasions of treatment as an 'outsider'. It is common to come into contact with social issues that one might not normally be exposed to outside of a reserve context- these frequently carry significant emotional weight and can be hard to come to terms with/relate to. This experience gave me more grounding and confidence on all of these challenges, and has prepared me personally for the more intensive fieldwork terms I will be conducting over the course of the next two years.

How has this project assisted your studies and personal development?

Key academic outcomes of the project were my development of relationships with Nisga'a youth, the deepening of their understanding of social development as it relates to the Nisga'a Treaty, and the concomitant creation of a social network designed to enable my research efforts to extend to 'socially remote' young research participants who by nature of their situation must be contacted via individuals with whom they have existing relationships. As previously noted, the project has also served to prepare me personally for the more intensive fieldwork terms I will be conducting over the course of the next two years.

# 'Teaching in a charity school in Nepal'

by Paul Grethe

**Location:** Patan, Kathmandu Valley, Nepal

**Award:** Ulysses Travel Fund

**Dates:** 6 August - 25 September 2010

At the beginning of August I set off for Nepal to spend seven weeks travelling and teaching. My time was split relatively neatly into three distinct periods in which I travelled to the south of Nepal to Chitwan during the school holidays, followed by almost a month teaching in Patan, and culminating with a trek in the Annapurna region of the Himalayas.

Expecting to start teaching immediately, I was pleasantly surprised to find that there was a short break in the school terms just as I arrived in Kathmandu. Having organised the trip with a group of others from Cambridge with whom I had fundraised some money to donate to the school, this provided the perfect opportunity to get to know some of the Kathmandu Valley and travel to Chitwan National Park before the seriousness of teaching began. Perhaps without real consideration of the risk involved in walking through a jungle inhabited by wild tigers, rhinos and crocodiles, it was a relief to emerge without incident and just one instance of panic; as silly as it may seem, we mistook the crashing of a rhino running away to be the crashing of one running towards us. It did not feel at all silly at the time, especially since, during the monsoon season, grasses grow well above the height of a human, and while it may be easy for tigers to slip through them, it is altogether more difficult for a person; spotting a tiger footprint just a couple of hours old was therefore rather unnerving.

Returning to the school, the bulk of my time was spent teaching and helping with organising the festivities. Nepali people have a saying to the effect that the Newar, the dominant ethnic group of the Kathmandu Valley, 'have 366 festivals each year'. Although this is an exaggeration, there was just one week in my time there in which there was not a day off for a festival. The result was a period of teaching that was rich in variation and experience. Perhaps the highlight in terms of festivities was Krishna's birthday, an event treated with huge reverence in the country. The teaching itself was hugely rewarding, if at times very challenging.

My primary role was to teach 'Social Studies', a mix of disciplines that included economics, history and politics, among others. The part of the syllabus I was assigned to teach was a couple of chapters in the textbook focussing on 'civic sense' and 'citizenship'. It became clear extremely quickly that, on top of planning lessons and ensuring understanding in a classes with very wide English-language abilities, a major difficulty was editing the textbook's sometimes wild statements. One example was in a discussion of race and ethnicity in the Class 6 textbook (for 11-12 year olds) – according to this textbook there are just three races across the whole of Asia, from Japan to Turkey: the whites, the yellows and the blacks. A lot of time was taken to avoid teaching the children such generalisations. It is partly through editing such as this that I got the strong impression that the presence of the other volunteers and me made a genuine impact on the education that the children received.

Affiliated to the school and the brainchild of the headmaster was another project I became involved in. 'Santi Shewa Ashram' is a centre from which local religious leaders would come and hold talks, but for my purposes as a teacher it also acted as a homework club for less privileged children who came after school to receive guidance and peer support on their work. This was some of the most rewarding work that I did, and there was clearly a great

appreciation of the work we did.

The Vice-Principal of the school was good enough to afford a fellow teacher and me a few days off at the end of our scheduled teaching period to go trekking, so keen was he to advertise the rest of the country to us. This we did, which allowed us to go to the Annapurna range to trek to Annapurna Base Camp. Perhaps the most enjoyable part of my trip to Nepal, trekking in the Himalayas exceeded all expectations that I had. The vastness of the landscape and the beauty of the mountain scenes was truly breathtaking. Unfortunately the monsoon in Nepal came especially late this year, such that we spent a lot of time trekking through dense fog and cloud. Our arrival at the base camp was therefore altogether underwhelming as visibility was about 50m. Nevertheless it was hugely enjoyable, and made the glimpses we got as the cloud cleared all the more stunning.

To conclude, Nepal for me offered a wealth of experiences that I was delighted to enjoy. Of course there were less comfortable moments living in a country so vastly different from our own, but I look very fondly on my time there. The contribution of the Ulysses Travel Fund to making it possible was invaluable, for which I am very grateful indeed.



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